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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000160

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR KOCI UN IN NP

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL GON MOVES ON
NON-COMBATANTS IN CANTONMENTS

REF: KATHMANDU 137

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NANCY J. POWELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B/D)

¶11. (C) Summary: Indian Ambassador Sood hosted a donor coordination discussion to review planning for discharge of 4000 non-combatants from the PLA cantonments. UNICEF and UNDP briefed comprehensive plans for a three-day out-processing to be followed by sixty options for vocational training. Considerable challenges remain before any program becomes a reality including obtaining GON buy-in, determining GON jurisdiction, countering political opposition, scheduling and the Indian role. End summary.

¶12. (C) Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood hosted a working lunch February 26 to review international planning in support of a possible move by the GON to discharge the 4000 non-combatants currently residing in the Maoist cantonments. Guests included UNMIN Special Representative, American and EU chiefs of mission, Danish DCM, UNICEF director, and UNDP office director. Sood briefed the group on PM Dahal's comments to Indian Foreign Secretary Menon (reftel) that he planned to discharge the 4000 as soon as possible, perhaps in as little time as six weeks. UNMIN representative commented that this was consistent with her discussions with deputy PLA commanders in two cantonments, who exhibited a willingness, for the first time, to consider segregating the non-combatants.

¶13. (C) UNDP and UNICEF briefed on a joint plan (to cover both minors and adults) that has been coordinated with the GON Peace and Reconstruction Ministry in both the current and former governments and with UNMIN. The essence of the plan calls for non-combatants in a cantonment to be segregated and to enter into a three-day out-processing program that would provide them with a description of post-cantonment alternatives, a formal deactivation ceremony, and transfer to one of sixty pre-existing vocational programs or to a holding center for return to their families. Minors would also be provided with assistance in tracing their families. At the conclusion of the vocational programs, which run for ninety days to one year, additional assistance is planned in the form of job placement assistance and micro credit. Using the UNDP/UNICEF plan, funds from the UN Trust Fund and the Nepal Peace Trust Fund should be available to manage the three-day out-processing and the vocational training. Additional funds will be needed for the final phase.

¶4. (C) Sood indicated that the GOI had been approached to provide assistance based on its programs for retiring Indian Gurkha soldiers. These involve basic vocational training only.

¶5. (C) Participants discussed the following challenges facing the discharge of non-combatants:

¶A. Assisting the GON to find the right balance between acting quickly and acting effectively. All were agreed that the handling of the 4000 would set an important precedent for the 19,000 PLA who will remain in the cantonments even though many of the issues are quite different. Participants emphasized the importance of individuals being free to make their choice and of real alternatives for them to choose from. It is also important the GON feel that it owns the process, but is willing to accept international expertise and financial assistance.

¶B. Determining which part of the GON will have jurisdiction. Although UNICEF and UNDP have been working with the Peace Ministry for over two years, it appears that the jurisdiction for the 4000 may shift to the Army Integration Special Committee (AISC), which assumed responsibility for camp management when it was created in January. Neither UN body has briefed the AISC. On February 27 Ambassador Powell encouraged the Prime Minister, chairman of the AISC, to reach out to UNDP and UNICEF to obtain a briefing for the AISC and to make use of the UN planning.

¶C. Countering Nepali Congress opposition. Nepali Congress AISC member Ram Mahat has been very vocal in his opposition to any use of GON funds (this would include the Nepal Peace Trust Fund) to provide support to the 4000, arguing that these folks did not participate in the fighting and are no different than thousands of other poor Nepalis, who do not have access to such programs. He has been deaf to arguments that other poor Nepalis have not spent the last thirty months in a military-like situation and are less likely to join the YCL or other groups engaged in criminal activities. Mahat could use his opposition to block consensus which must be achieved in order for the AISC to take action. Ambassador Sood plans to reach out to NC President Koirala to encourage the NC to take a more positive position on the UN proposals.

¶D. Segregating the non-combatants. The Peace Ministry has proposed that the 4000 non-combatants be aggregated in one satellite cantonment for out-processing. The UN prefers that the out-processing occur camp-by-camp according to a schedule worked out with UNMIN and the PLA commanders. They believe there is no reason to displace residents of one of the satellite cantonments, create a new infrastructure for the three-day processing, and incur significant transportation costs. In addition, processing all 4000 at one time in one location would probably require additional time or a massive infusion of personnel.

¶E. Determining the Indian role. Although the meeting was held at Ambassador Sood's initiative and he appeared to be pleased with the status of the UN planning, the outstanding request for Indian assistance and the Indian preference for unilateral assistance rather than donor coordination left some questions in the minds of the other participants as to India's position on the UN programs.

¶6. (C) Comment. Provided all elements of the GON are willing to accept something like the UNICEF/UNDP proposal, it appears that sufficient funding and expertise are available for this phase. Post will be working with USAID and DOD to examine possible assistance to the final phase based on experience in other post-conflict countries and with our current vocational education programs.